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ABSTRACT

The relationship between maternal employment and maternal and paternal parenting styles is investigated in this study. Subjects included 117 two-parent families with elementary school children. Responses were obtained from 111 mothers and 24 fathers. The survey was conducted by a telephone interview lasting 10-15 minutes in duration. Questions concerned: (1) parental employment status; (2) spousal relationship; (3) parent-child relationship; (4) and parenting practices. Results showed that nonemployed mothers were most likely to have perceived high spousal support of their parenting. No significant differences were found between families with employed and unemployed mothers for frequency of children's baths, a specific parent preferred for comfort, or the number of breakfasts and dinners the family shared together. Few significant parenting styles emerged. Results suggested that in response to the child pushing another child, nonemployed mothers were more likely to use verbal interventions, whereas employed mothers were more likely to use behavioral and control interventions. Contains 11 references. (SR)

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The Relationship Between Parenting Style and Maternal Employment in Families with Elementary School Students

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Abstract

This study investigated the relationship between maternal employment and maternal and paternal parenting styles. Families with children currently in second grade participated in a telephone survey. Questions concerned parental employment status, spousal relationship, parent-child relationship, and parenting practices.

The results showed that nonemployed mothers were more likely to have perceived high spousal support of their parenting. No significant differences were found between families with employed and unemployed mothers for frequency of children's baths, a specific parent preferred for comfort, or the number of breakfasts and dinners the family shared together.

Few significant differences in parenting style emerged. Results suggested that in response to pushing, nonemployed mothers were more likely to use verbal interventions, whereas employed mothers were more likely to use behavioral and control interventions.

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The results also showed that families were not negatively affected by a recent local teachers' strike or a local double murde .

Introduction

There has been much controversy surrounding assumptions about optimal parental practices, and the effects they may have on children's development. Baumrind's (1971) typology, which distinguishes authoritative, authoritarian, and permissive parenting practices, has yielded consistent research findings delineating the types of parenting associated with successful socialization of children. Hart, et al. (1992), has indicated that parental power assertion and induction are two prominent forms of discipline that have been consistently linked to ways that children think and behave in social situations, particularly with their peers.

The present study extends previous research on the relationship between maternal employment and parenting practices (Gustafson, et al. 1995). The responses of preschoolers' parents to four prototypical problem behavior scenarios were used to assess parenting style. These hypothetical situations describe disciplinary contexts where children (a) picked flowers from a neighbor's garden, (b) refused to go to bed at bedtime on a school night, (c) grabbed a toy away from another child while playing together and (d) pushed another child to the ground after that child had accidently run into her/him. As with the study done by Gustafson, et al., the parents' responses were classified by researchers into 4 categories. The practices were described as 1 of the following: (a) passive neglecting or ignoring, (b) verbal reasoning with the child, (c) structured control within limits and behavioral intervention, and/or (d) abusive punishing. An example

of a passive response would be a laissez-faire parent who did nothing in reaction to the child's misbehavior. An example of a verbal reasoning response would be a parent who encouraged the child talk to through the problem and discuss alternative behaviors. An example of a structured control response would be a parent who used time-out consequences following misbehavior. An example of an abusive response would be a parent who physically hurt the child during disciplining.

In addition, this study included questions pertaining to recent local events. The first set of these questions dealt with a Montgomery County School District strike. These questions measured the stress level of the parents, and also assessed child care arrangements during the strike. The second set of questions concerned responses to a recent local double murder. These items addressed whether the children had been negatively affected by this event, and also if special precautionary measures had been taken subsequent to the abductions.

A variety of demographic variables and family behaviors were assessed, ranging from daily rituals, distribution of family responsibilities, and perception of spousal support. The relationships between these dependent variables and family maternal employment status were investigated.

Method

Subjects:

The subjects used in this study included 138 families from the Philadelphia region. The majority of the subjects surveyed were referred by the Oaks Elementary School and the Parent Resource Center, both located in Montgomery County, Pennsylvania. Twenty single-parent families were excluded, yielding a sample of 117 two-parent families. Responses were obtained from 111 mothers and 24 fathers from these families with 70 female and 65 male children.

Procedure:

The survey used in this study was conducted by a telephone interview lasting approximately 10-15 minutes in duration. The object of the questionnaire was to measure the relationship between maternal employment and parenting styles. The survey consisted of 38-items which were developed by the researchers and pertained to issues such as employment status, division of responsibility for child care and household chores. Parents were also asked to respond to four hypothetical disciplinary scenarios depicting preschool misbehavior. The four situations were adapted from a study conducted by Hart et al. (1992) which assessed the reliability and validity of these measures of parenting style. The researchers also included additional questions pertaining to the prior strike in the Oaks Elementary School District at the beginning of the year and recent murders which occurred in the

Collegeville area, involving the death of a mother and her two-year old daughter.

In the first section of the questionnaire, respondents were asked to disclose information about their age, gender, and marital status. Subjects were also asked to disclose their children's age and gender, along with each child's specific weekly bedtime and wake-up time.

The second part of the survey pertained to parents' employment. Subjects were asked to indicate the number of hours each spouse worked and to describe what type of work each performed in order to allow the researchers to determine whether they held a professional, white-collar/managerial, or blue-collar/non-supervisory position. Questions regarding maternal employment for each spouse's mother were included in this section as well. Mother's employment status was considered full-time if she worked at least 37 hours and part-time if less than 37 hours. Within the sample of mothers, 30 mothers were employed full-time, 49 held part-time jobs, and 39 reported being unemployed. Mothers who reported either holding a full-time or part-time job, were also asked to indicate how their children were being cared for during their work hours (group care, family care, at home care, or by a relative).

In the third section of the survey, questions addressed responsibility for overall child care and the support respondents received from their spouse regarding their parenting skills. Subjects were also asked to disclose the average number of baths they or their partner give their child a week, how many times a

week their family eats breakfast and dinner together, and to indicate who is responsible for the majority of emotional comforting when their child is upset.

The fourth part of the survey included four hypothetical scenarios describing disciplinary situations in which a child (a) picked flowers from a neighbor's flower garden, (b) refused to go to bed at their bed time on a week night, (c) grabbed a toy away from another child while playing together, and (d) pushed another child to the ground who had accidently run into him or her. In responding to the four scenarios, parents were asked to mention all possible strategies they might use in each situation.

The final section of the survey included questions which pertained to the prior strike in the Oaks Elementary School District. The questions in this section were designed to elicit information from respondents as to whether or not the strike had an effect on the respondent's family life. Subjects were asked to disclose how stressful the strike had been for the respondent, what types of activities their children were involved in, and whether or not their children were being supervised by somebody over the age of twelve. Researchers chose twelve years as the cutoff age since laws in both Pennsylvania and New Jersey, consider it illegal to leave a child under 12 home alone by themselves.

Additional questions regarding a horrifying recent double murder of a mother and her two-year old daughter in the Collegeville area were also included in this segment of the survey. The questions focused on how, if at all, the respondents and their families were affected by the double murders. The subjects were

asked to reveal if they felt their children had been negatively affected by the murders, did they consciously avoid the shopping center at which the murders took place, and were any extra precautions taken as a result of the murders.

Results

Intercorrelation among the responses to the four disciplinary scenarios showed a significant relationship between responses to the item concerning picking flowers and the item involving pushing ($r=.28$, $p<.01$, $n=108$). A significant relationship was also found between responses to the item involving toy grabbing and the pushing item ($r=.25$, $p<.01$, $n=108$). No other significant relationships were found among the disciplinary scenarios.

Results indicated that nearly half of those surveyed adopted a reasoning type of parenting style with reference to the issue children's picking a neighbor's flowers. Roughly a quarter of those surveyed used a more structured behavioral approach. Twenty percent of those surveyed stated that they would ignore the picking, and would not inflict any form of punishment for this behavior.

Almost three-quarters of those surveyed indicated that they would use a behavioral control technique when their child refused to go to bed. Roughly a third (34.8%) of those surveyed preferred to use words to appeal to the child. A small percentage of the parents said they would ignore the refusal of bedtime and an even smaller number (2.9%) suggested that they would more severely respond to their child for this misbehavior.

Grabbing a toy from and pushing another child elicited similar active responses (verbal or nonverbal behavior) from almost all parents (over 90%). No one indicated use of any violent punishment for grabbing and only 3.6% would physically punish pushing. Half responded that they would take behavioral steps (rather than mere

verbal steps) to control either of these situations. The responses to the behavioral scenarios in this study parallel the results of the previous study (Gustafson, et.al., 1995).

In this sample, over half of those surveyed indicated that they gave their children at least 5 baths a week. Only 10% of the parents reported bathing their children less than 5 times a week.

In reference to the dinner variable, results showed that 33% of families eat together seven times a week.

Families were divided into 3 maternal employment status groups on the basis of mothers' weekly number of work hours (full-time equaling at least 37 hours; part-time equaling less than 37 hours, and unemployed). One way ANOVA reviewed few significant differences across the 3 maternal employment groups were observed. No significant differences were found between employed and unemployed mothers for frequency of baths, a specific parent preferred for comfort, or the number of breakfasts and dinners the family shared together.

A one-way ANOVA revealed significant differences in perceived spousal support and child management across the maternal employment groups. Families with unemployed mothers reported perceived spousal support (full-time $x=8.54$, $s.d.=1.86$, $n=24$ versus part-time $x=8.67$, $s.d.=1.60$, $n=46$ versus unemployed $x=9.41$, $s.d.=.78$, $n=34$, $p<.05$). Families with employed mothers were more likely to have parents share responsibility for child management than those with unemployed mothers (full-time $x=2.68$, $s.d.=.47$, $n=25$ versus part-time $x=2.58$, $s.d.=.49$, $n=46$ versus unemployed $x=2.23$, $s.d.=.58$, $n=38$, $p<.01$).

Generally, responses to the four behavioral scenarios did not differ across maternal employment groups. However, responses to the "pushing" scenario, showed a trend suggesting that unemployed mothers were more likely to use verbal interventions, while employed mothers were more likely to use behavioral control interventions (full-time $x=2.70$, s.d.=.75 versus part-time $x=2.64$, s.d. .53 versus unemployed $x=2.35$, s.d.=.63, $p<.08$).

Results indicated that 10.9% of the parents thought the strike was very stressful. 15.2% of the children were supervised by their mother or father during the strike. Roughly 10% of the families used other types of supervision for their children during the strike. Only 7% of those surveyed indicated that they left their children alone during the strike. 21% indicated that their children were always supervised by someone over the age of 12 years.

In reference to the double-murder in Collegeville, 23% of the parents indicated that the murders had not resulted in their avoidance of the shopping center, while 8% indicated that they have avoided the shopping center. Additionally, 25% of the parents responded that their children had not been negatively affected by this incident.

Discussion

The results of this study indicated that the parenting styles of families with employed mothers do not differ significantly from the parenting styles of families with unemployed mothers. Few differences in responses to hypothetical disciplinary situations were found across the maternal employment groups. The families did report differences in perceived spousal support and sharing of responsibility for managing children. Nonemployed mothers reported higher perceived spousal support, and families with full-time employed mothers were more likely to share responsibility for managing children. Nonemployed mothers may receive greater support because they are more able to meet their husband's needs because he is the only one who economically supports the family. Nonemployed mothers may also receive greater spousal support because their performance as a parent is not compromised by the conflicting demands that may result from their job.

This study showed that most parents would use a behavioral control technique when their children refused to go to bed.

The failure to obtain a significant difference between employed and nonemployed mothers for frequency of baths, a specific parent preferred for comfort, or the number of breakfasts and dinners the family shared together suggests that these phenomena are not highly influenced by parents' work schedules. Independent of parental employment, children could be involved in extracurricular activities that interfere with the breakfast or dinner time of the family.

For a large majority of the parents, the teachers' strike was

not seen as highly stressful. This could be because most parents easily found some type of alternative supervision for their children. Another reason may be that a large portion of the parents did not work, and were able to watch their children during the strike.

Most families reported that they were not affected by the double-murder in Collegeville. This may have been due to the fact that the murderer was apprehended promptly.

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